



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE REAL KNOWLEDGE OF A FOREIGN COUNTRY

By L. L. STROEBE

I. INTRODUCTION

THE war has taught us that the study of modern languages in our colleges and universities has not brought to our students all we hoped for. Many a soldier has found himself in a foreign country, unable to speak the language, in spite of the fact, that he had for several years pursued French or German courses in the high school and the university. Others were able to make themselves understood, as far as the needs of daily life were concerned, perhaps they also had a fair knowledge of the literature, but they knew nothing or had only the most superficial ideas about the history, the geography and the institutions of the foreign country, concerned. And those were, perhaps, men who for years had taken courses in foreign languages and literature at college and university, and had perhaps themselves taught French and German in an American high school. Even before the beginning of the war the whole country realized that the teaching of foreign languages was in need of improvement, and there is no doubt, that, as far as the oral work is concerned, a great deal has been accomplished. But little has been done in our colleges to give the students a knowledge of the foreign country, even to students who were specializing in the language of that country and were to teach it later on. There has been a great deal of talk about the teaching of "Realien," i.e., the geography, history and institutions of the foreign countries in our high schools and lately there have been innumerable little text books giving scraps of information about those subjects for our high school pupils. We are almost inclined to say that the pendulum has swung too far, and at a time when high school pupils ought to spend their time on verb drill and on the acquisition of a simple vocabulary, they are fed with facts which they can not understand about the government and the school system of the foreign country. It is clear that high school pupils are not mature enough for this kind of

work, and a real study of those subjects may better be taken up in college or even in the first year of graduate work. But it seems to me an absolute necessity for a college student who is specializing in French, German, Spanish or any other language to receive at some point in his career, definite instruction in the geography, history, the political institutions, the educational system and the most important features of the social and intellectual activity in the foreign country of his choice. In looking over college and university catalogues we can find some hopeful beginnings in this direction, but only a very small number of institutions consider the subject worthy of a distinct course of study. Quite a number of these subjects are discussed in the courses in literature, as modern literature especially can not be understood without a certain amount of such information, but a separate course is needed, in order to collect and supplement the scattered information which the students have accumulated in different ways during their college course.

There is great possibility of variation in such a course, as it must cover so many different subjects and its unity lies only in the fact that these subjects all pertain to one and the same foreign country. So this paper does not at all mean to dictate the method to be followed in giving such a course, but merely to give suggestions based on the experience of one person in trying to solve the problem. These suggestions as to how to acquire a real knowledge of a foreign country are intended not only for college instructors who conduct such courses, but will be especially useful for teachers and other persons who feel the need of such information for themselves. A large number of such people will be found among the teachers of modern languages in our high schools. Very few of them have had the opportunity of doing this kind of work in college, as very few colleges offer such courses, and those which offer them now have done so only recently. The demands on the professional education of modern language teachers in this country have increased tremendously within the last ten or fifteen years. Not only a speaking knowledge of the foreign idiom is demanded, but sound first hand information about the country itself is one of the prime requirements for effective, successful teaching. A great number of teachers attend summer schools in order to gain more knowledge and it is there especially that they find out that a

few weeks work in summer is not sufficient for their purposes and that they feel the need of more reading and studying during the rest of the year. But they do not have the time nor the necessary knowledge of books and other sources of information to plan out a course of reading for themselves and are therefore dependent on courses planned for their special benefit. Most of them have read a few books about the foreign country in English, for instance the books in the collection "*Our European Neighbours*" edited by W. H. Dawson, are widely known. Some of these, however, are most superficial and misleading, for instance the chapter on French Education in "*French Life in Town and Country*" is most unfair to France, as it is evidently written by a person with very little knowledge of the subject and absolutely no standards of comparison. There is no doubt that the average high school teacher of modern languages needs a guide for the study of the foreign country and it seems the duty of those who have worked in this special line to supply them with such guidance.

As far as German is concerned my suggestions for the choice of material rest on actual teaching experience, as I have conducted courses of this kind for almost ten years with undergraduate and graduate students at Vassar College and at my German summer school.

It seems important to me, that such a course should not be offered too early. In order to profit fully by it, students ought to be able to read the foreign language as rapidly as their own; they ought to be able to express themselves in a simple but clear way, and they must be mature enough to compare the institutions of the foreign country with those of their own country. The latter part of the undergraduate course in college or the first post-graduate year seems to be the time most suited to such work. Such a course offers excellent material for oral and written composition, as the formal part is just as important as the subject matter. We all agree that students need continuous practice in composition, in oral as well as written work, and courses in advanced prose composition have always been required of those specializing in modern languages. The material for these courses, however, is often chosen without system or continuity, ranging from the discussion of a literary question and outlines of the contents of novels and dramas to the description of pictures. Usually very little effort is made, to

connect one theme with another or to employ in the next lesson the words and phrases learned in the preceding one. If, however, the written and oral work centers around definite subjects, systematically built up on a study of "Realien," there is more hope that students will acquire a large vocabulary and fluency in its use. Students are much more interested in their themes if they have the feeling that they are not merely writing an "exercise," but that they are writing about subjects which are connected with each other and which have to do with real life. The interest in the subject matter certainly promotes an interest in the form. After students have looked up the topic for themselves, they feel that it is worth while to write about it or to stand before the class and give the others information about the foreign country which they have gathered and which they feel is valuable and interesting. Standing before the class and giving a talk in the foreign language is an excellent means of practice in the fluent and correct use of the foreign idiom. Emphasis is to be put on a clear and distinct pronunciation. Among the regulations for the Students' Army Training Corps it was suggested that students who are reciting or giving reports in the class room should stand at attention and should speak in a clear and distinct voice, as this is of "military importance." It is certainly not only of military importance, but just as advisable and necessary in any other walk of life, and that regulation should certainly not be forgotten in times of peace.

There are certain general principles which must be considered, if students are to gain definite results from such a course. First of all, the recitation must be conducted in the foreign language, as this course is meant to supplement other language courses. If students after two or three years of high school work and another two or three years of college work, are not able to express themselves in the foreign language in such a way that they can be understood, it shows clearly that their teaching has been very inferior.

The second point of importance is that students must have access to the original sources of information, and they must not study their subject from compilations in the English language. Of course good books written in the English language about the foreign countries have their place and may be read occasionally to supplement other work, but they are certainly not to be used as

regular text books. The choice of books, or to be more correct, the choice of many different chapters in many different books, is a tremendous task for the instructor, and to work out a course where the material is to be culled from so many different sources is a work of several years.

Another important point to be considered is, that the self-activity of the students is to be stimulated as much as possible, a principle which has to be considered in all teaching. This precludes a mere lecture course, but there are many cases where a short and clear introduction of five or ten minutes by the instructor is necessary, in order to enable students to understand the subject or the assignment for the next recitation. The preparation for the class work can be done in different ways by the students and it is well to vary the methods. Often students can be sent to the library to find out for themselves what they can about the subject under discussion; they will thus learn in time where to find general information and where to find more specific details. Very often, however, the subject is complex and difficult and the instructor will have to assign definite reading in definite books, in order to save time and effort on the part of the students.

Such a course can not be well conducted without a liberal supply of books, charts, pictures and other equipment. The greatest help toward a general survey of any of the subjects under consideration is a good encyclopedia and students ought to be trained from the beginning to consult such books first. For French there is the *Grand Dictionnaire universel du vingtième siècle*, by Pierre Larousse, and *La Grande Encyclopédie*, each containing more than twenty-five volumes. The new *Larousse Illustré* in eight volumes is, however, quite sufficient for our purposes. (*Nouveau Larousse Illustré*, Directeur: Claude Augé, Librairie Larousse, Paris). In German there is the *Grosse Konversations-Lexikon* of Brockhaus and that of Meyer, each containing more than twenty volumes. In Spanish, where fewer books are available, an encyclopedia is an absolute necessity. Of the three large ones, *Diccionario Universal de la lengua castellana, ciencias y artes* (D. Nicolas Mario Serrano, Madrid), the *Diccionario Enciclopédico Hispano Americano de Literatura, Ciencias y Artes*, (Barcelona, Montanna y Simon), and the *Enciclopedia Universale Illystrada Europeo-Americano* (Barcelona, José Espase), the latter

is the best for our purposes. Brockhaus and Meyer have also each published smaller editions of their encyclopedias in two and three volumes and in many cases those are sufficient for a general orientation. I have not been able to discover, either in French or in Spanish, any thing as good and as condensed as these short encyclopedias.

Next to these compilations, good guide books in the language of the country they describe are the greatest help to students as reference books. There are several volumes of Baedeker for France and Germany, and one each for Spain and South-America. They all contain valuable introductions about art and architecture and also much historical information. For France the *Guides Joanne* are to be highly recommended. Murray and Ford are good guide books for Spain, but unfortunately there are no Spanish editions of them. Often small local guide books can be procured and they will be found very useful.

Besides large and small encyclopedias and guide books, a great many other books are needed, but the cost of such books need not be charged to the language departments alone, as books on history, government, art, in the foreign language are just as valuable for the other departments concerned. Most of our colleges demand of their students before graduation a reading knowledge of one or two foreign languages, but this requirement becomes an empty form if the departments are not willing to demand of their students that they use books in the foreign language, whenever—as is quite often the case—the best information on the subject has not yet been made accessible in English. The charming French books in the collection "*Les villes d'art célèbres*" (H. Laurens, Editeur, Paris) are just as valuable for the departments of art, architecture or history, as they are for the department of French; and the excellent *Monographien zur Geschichte, zur Kunst, und zur Erdkunde Deutschlands* (published by Velhagen and Klasing, Leipzig), are just as important for the respective departments as they are for the department of German.

The underlying principles are the same, whether such a course deals with France, Germany, Spain or any other country, though the distribution of subjects might slightly differ in the different languages. If we have a two or three hour course through the whole year, the first semester might be spent entirely on geography

and history, the word geography being taken in its wider sense and including the relation of physical features to living things, to industry, agriculture, the development of cities, etc. Of the history only an outline, a kind of frame work, can be mastered in such a short time. History and geography are the most important subjects and the study of others will be much more successful if the instructor can rely on a certain amount of information in these two. The second semester might be divided equally between a study of the constitution and government, the administration and the political life of the country in question, its school system and its universities, its art, newspapers, periodicals, daily life. A Spanish course of this kind naturally would have to include a study of the conditions in of the South American republics. This is perhaps too great a mass of material to be mastered in two semesters. Some subjects, however, might be dealt with more superficially than in the case of other foreign countries, as there is little doubt that Spanish America has less to give to American students intellectually than the other foreign countries studied, however important its present or future commercial relations with the United States may be.

Such a course of study naturally is open to the accusation of superficiality. It is impossible to learn in a short three hour course even the history of the foreign country; how can students acquire in this brief time a knowledge of other topics besides history? But such a course is not meant for students and specialists in history, art, political science or any other separate subject. It is merely meant to be a supplementary course for the study of modern philology taken in the broader sense as the term is used in Europe, meaning a study of the language, the literature and the life of a foreign nation.

Such a course can be taught only by an American instructor who has had several years of residence abroad and who knows the foreign country and its people, their history, institutions, ideals, culture, aspirations and national characteristics intimately, sympathetically and from first-hand observation. If the instructor is a native of the foreign country, the same knowledge of, and the same attitude toward American conditions is to be expected of him.

Vassar College.

(To be continued)